



*United States Attorney
Southern District of New York*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
JULY 16, 2003

CONTACT: U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
MARVIN SMILON, HERBERT HADAD,
MICHAEL KULSTAD
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
(212) 637-2600

**U.S. CHARGES 8 NEWSSTAND AND BODEGA OPERATORS
IN SCHEME TO PURCHASE STOLEN POSTAGE STAMPS**

JAMES B. COMEY, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and WILLIAM KEZER, the Postal Inspector in Charge of the New York Office of the Postal Inspection Service, announced that eight individuals, who operate newsstands and bodegas in Manhattan and Brooklyn, were arrested yesterday on charges of purchasing stolen postage stamps. The defendants are charged in five separate criminal Complaints and, in total, the defendants are alleged to have purchased the stolen stamps on thousands of occasions.

According to the Complaints, from the early 1990s through 2002, a number of individuals stole postage stamps from United States Post Offices in Manhattan, among other places, by writing checks on bank accounts that contained insufficient funds. The stolen stamps were then allegedly resold to the defendants at less than face value. In 2002, the Postal

Inspection Service ran an undercover operation and obtained surveillance tapes documenting such purchases made by the defendants.

Among those arrested yesterday were HABIBUR MELLA, a/k/a "Minto," and MAYEEN MISBA, a/k/a "Cupbie," the operators of a newsstand at 53rd Street and Third Avenue in Manhattan. According to the Complaint, MELLA and MISBA paid cash for stolen stamps on approximately 100 occasions, and made three purchases from an undercover Postal Inspector. The Complaint alleges that, on or about August 1, 2002, MISBA paid \$4,000 in cash to an undercover Postal Inspector in exchange for 200 rolls of stamps, which had a total face value of \$7,400. The Complaint further alleges that, on or about August 8, 2002, and September 6, 2002, MELLA paid a total of \$8,000 in cash to an undercover Postal Inspector in exchange for 400 rolls of stamps, which had a total face value of \$14,800.

Defendant ZAFAR IQBAL, a/k/a "Iqbal," the operator of a newsstand at 875 Third Avenue in Manhattan, is also charged with purchasing stolen postage stamps on approximately 100 occasions. The Complaint further alleges that ZAFAR IQBAL purchased a total of 650 coils of stamps from an undercover Postal Inspector on four separate occasions from about August 1, 2002 to September 6, 2002. IQBAL paid \$13,300 in cash for the stamps, which had a total face value of \$24,050. According to the Complaint, IQBAL

requested that the undercover Postal Inspector refer to the stamps as "candy" when discussing the transactions.

Defendant SALEH MUSA, a/k/a "Sal," the operator of a bodega located at 310 Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn, is charged with purchasing stolen postage stamps on approximately 1,000 occasions. The Complaint further charges that MUSA purchased a total of 600 coils of stamps from an undercover Postal Inspector on three separate occasions in a two-week period. MUSA paid \$12,000 in cash for the stamps, which had a total face value of \$22,200. According to the Complaint, MUSA requested that the undercover Postal Inspector refer to the stamps as "phone cards" when discussing the transactions. MUSA is also alleged to have provided moneys for false identification documents in order to further the purchase of stamps from the Post Office with fraudulent checks.

Defendants ALI MAHMMOD HUSSAIN, a/k/a "Mohammad," and ALHATHAMI SALEH AL HAITHAMI, a/k/a "Anthony," the operators of a grocery store located at Newkirk and East 16th Street in Brooklyn, are charged with purchasing stolen postage stamps on approximately 1,000 occasions. The Complaint further charges that HUSSAIN purchased a total of 500 coils of stamps from an undercover Postal Inspector on three occasions in September 2002. HUSSAIN paid \$10,000 in cash for the stamps, which had a total

face value of \$18,500. According to the Complaint, HUSSAIN and AL HAITHAMI also provided moneys for false identification documents in order to further the purchase of stamps from the Post Office with fraudulent checks.

Also arrested yesterday were KALPESHKUMAR PATEL, a/k/a "Kenny" and BHAVESHKUMARI PATEL, the operators of a newsstand at Eighth Avenue and 34th Street in Manhattan. KALPESHKUMAR PATEL and BHARESHKUMARI PATEL are charged with purchasing 100 rolls of stolen postage stamps on approximately 10 occasions. They are also alleged to have purchased a total of 300 coils of stamps from an undercover Postal Inspector on three occasions during a two-week period in September-October 2002.

The defendants are expected to appear in Manhattan federal court later today.

Mr. COMEY praised the efforts of the United States Postal Inspection Service in the investigation of this case.

Mr. COMEY said the investigation is continuing.

Assistant United States Attorney CHRISTINA BISCHOFF is in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the Complaints are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

03-175

###